



## A Fatal Attraction: Love, Betrayal and Murder in The Postman Always Rings Twice James M. Cain

Instructor. Raid Jassim Mohammed

وزارة التربية / المديرية العامة للتربية في محافظة ديالى

### Abstract

*This work, James M. Cain's The Postman Always Rings Twice, is analyzed via the lens of psychoanalytic criticism and Marxist materialism. The study shows that the novel is not merely a tragic crime story, but also a sharp exploration of the corrosive nature of desire. By analyzing the characters, their motivations, and their fatalistic lives, the study shows how Cain utilizes the genre of hard-boiled fiction to study the psychological drives of repressed persons and the economic despair of the Depression era the central conflict is analyzed as a microcosm of the strain between innate behavior and social law, the failure of capitalist ideology, and the power dynamics in gender relations. Ultimately, the analysis shows that the titular "postman" serves as a metaphor for the inescapable finality of fate and the inevitable consequences of violation. The paper concludes that The Postman Always Rings Twice persists as a compelling and enduring work of American literature due to its sharp critique of human nature and its unsparing depiction of existential entanglements.*

*This paper aims to shed light on the destructive forces of tumultuous desires and greed and how they contribute to the decay of morality. The work is based on a thematic study that focuses on analyzing, discussing, explaining, and drawing on psychoanalytic theory and crime fiction studies. In this paper, the personalities of Cora and Frank are examined from an ethical and sociological perspective, and the underlying motives for their behavior are worked out.*

Email: jassraed6@gmail.com

Published: 1- 12-2025

Keywords: femme fatale;  
desire; hard-boiled crime fiction;  
moral decay

هذه مقالة وصول مفتوح بموجب ترخيص

CC BY 4.0

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

## المخلص

يتم تحليل هذا العمل، "ساعي البريد يدق دائماً مرتين" لجيمس م. كين، من خلال عدسة نقد التحليل النفسي والمادية الماركسية. وتظهر الدراسة أن الرواية ليست مجرد قصة جريمة مأساوية، بل هي أيضاً استكشاف حاد للطبيعة التآكلية للرغبة. ومن خلال تحليل الشخصيات ودوافعها وحياتهم القدرية، تظهر الدراسة كيف يستخدم كين نوع الأدب البوليسي المتشدد لتحليل الدوافع النفسية للأشخاص المكبوتين واليأس الاقتصادي في فترة الكساد. ويتم تحليل الصراع المركزي باعتباره نموذجاً مصغراً للتوتر بين السلوك الفطري والقانون الاجتماعي، وفشل الأيديولوجية الرأسمالية وديناميكيات القوة في العلاقات بين الجنسين. وفي نهاية المطاف، يظهر التحليل أن "ساعي البريد" الذي يحمل عنوان العمل يعمل كاستعارة للنهاية الحتمية للقدر والعواقب الحتمية للانتهاك. وخلصت الورقة إلى أن رواية "ساعي البريد يدق دائماً مرتين" لاتزال عملاً مقنعاً ودائماً في الأدب الأمريكي بسبب نقدها الحاد للطبيعة البشرية وتصويرها القاسي للتشابكات الوجودية.

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تسليط الضوء على القوى المدمرة للرغبات المضطربة والجشع وكيفية مساهمتها في انحطاط الأخلاق. يعتمد العمل على دراسة موضوعية تركز على التحليل والمناقشة والشرح والاستفادة من نظرية التحليل النفسي ودراسات روايات الجريمة. في هذه الورقة، تم تحليل شخصيتي كورا وفرانك من وجهة نظر أخلاقية واجتماعية وتم تحديد الدوافع الكامنة وراء سلوك هذه الشخصيات.

## Introduction

James Mallahan Cain was an American novelist and the flagship author of hardboiled crime novels. In particular, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. He was born in Annapolis, the capital of the state of Maryland, in 1892. Cain grew up in a home filled with kinds of knowledge, especially literature books. His father, a university professor of Latin, Greek, and history, instilled in Cain a desire to read and write from an early age. In 1910, Cain graduated from Washington College, earning a bachelor's degree in journalism. His favorite subject was literature (Madden 1). He afterwards embarked on a career in journalism as a reporter for various newspapers in America. In particular, for The New York World and the Baltimore. His work as a journalist has an impact on his way of writing. His skills in the field of journalism made him a professional writer. Thus, he focused on capturing the bitter facts of society's daily dilemmas (Cain 299). *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, published in 1934, is a novel that talks of a hitchhiker with no moral principles and a troubled past who embarks on a steamy and deadly relationship with a beautiful, capricious married woman with an inconvenient spouse (Badley, Nestingen & Seppälä 140). The events of the novel revolve around the switch from dreams to nightmares. Driven by infatuation or a passion for riches, or both, Cora and Frank embark on an evil deed, experience a foretaste of triumph, and then squander it all (Scaggs 112). A complex situation with a filthy dilemma for which there is only one awful solution – a solution that only produces further dilemmas that nobody will solve (Cain 458). A person has the capacity to commit a murder and get away with it, but he cannot live with it. The title of the novel goes back to an old superstition that says: If a letter carrier

knocks on your door twice in a short time, this indicates bad news. The word “postman” in the title does not refer to an earthly telegram job but to the fate that awaits Frank at the end, and which will soon land him on death row (Brook 120).

### Literature Review

Numerous theses, dissertations, and articles at various universities and in different countries dealing with the novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* from different perspectives. Gabriel Miller, in *Screening the Novel: Rediscovered American Fiction in Film*, Bloomsbury Publishing (2016), mentions that the quintessential Cain novel, *Postman*, is certainly rich enough to be enjoyed on multiple levels. As a novel set in 1939 and in some ways characterized by the depression (though not proletarian in the political sense), it can be read as an exploration of the American Dream exposed as an empty delusion. The novel's protagonist, Frank Chambers, is not a very intelligent member of the proletariat, tries to come to terms with Depression-era America. Madden calls him a "simple-minded Whitman" because he is enamored of the open road and a life on the move.

Jopi Nyman, in: *Men Alone: Masculinity, Individualism and Hard-Boiled Fiction*. Rodopi (1997) mentions that autonomy and autonomous action are the cornerstones of individualism and American masculinity. Autonomy is the most important quality that the hard-boiled man must possess. While these hard-boiled novels emphasize the importance of unfettered autonomy, the masculine ideal of autonomous action conflicts with fractures in the ideology of individualism. This paper argues that Cain's work shows how sexual desire and greed lead to moral decay through the archetype of the femme fatale. Paul Skenazy describes the novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* as "extravagant melodramas of violence and passion" (Mayer 274).

The black hole in this novel is a woman's collaboration with her beau to kill her husband. It begins on a chair in a restaurant and ends on an electric chair. A traveler tricks someone to get mendicancy meals, but a cook gives him an unlawful recipe instead. Fate brings together two flawed characters, a perfidious associate and a duplicitous peer. A grifter hobo, i.e., Frank, tries to defraud a woman, i.e., Cora, but gets conned in the process. Cora and Frank begin their relationship with a cockatiel of pleasure and end in pain. Nick trusted Frank, but Frank betrayed that trust, and Cora also betrayed the trust of her husband, i.e., Nick. So do not trust individuals from the first meeting, regardless of how close they are, and do not talk to/or Frank[ly]. Even though trust is the backbone of a relationship and a healthy society, it may be unabashedly broken at any time. Cora swings back and forth between two men. The first, Nick, is a legitimate husband, and the other, Frank, becomes legitimate after the death of the first

husband. With the first, she is drowning in problems, with the second, she is drowning in forbidden adore. In a marriage, trust and fidelity are the most important elements that form its foundation and strength. But lately, infidelity and killing are the common trendy package in the crime market. Cora and Frank have a blind ambition that repeatedly leads them to evade the consequences of their crime by twisting all possible evidence relating to their conviction and misleading the course of justice, but eventually they get their fair comeuppance. Cain provides a useful lens through which to discern the precise details of a novel. The productive question is, what are the reasons behind their behaviors? If someone's life is destroyed by another individual's, one must regard it as a loan that will one day be paid back with interest. In this respect, the novel reveals the dark and intertwined motivations of the characters, studies how their primitive desires lead them to deceit, betrayal, and ultimately murder.

The owner of a gas station and snack bar, called Nick Papadakis, falls prey to his sensuous wife and her beau, an uprooted hobo and grifter. They begin a sordid, steamy, illicit relationship and a nefarious plan. They conspired to kill their victim, an immigrant Greek husband (Brauer 73).

Cora Papadakis is a seductive and cunning female, and is more sinister than her outward appearance suggests. She wants to begin a new life with her husband after she runs away from her old life as a waitress, but she is unsatisfied with her old Greek husband, and the hitchhiker becomes her motivation to change her life and to be her accomplice (Hardy 267). Cora has three weapons at her disposal: Tears for sympathy, her beauty, and her sexual attraction, which give her a destructive power that she utilizes to control Frank, and this situation, in her opinion, forms the center of her authority (Brower 145). When she was a girl, she won a beauty competition in her Iowa birthplace, with a journey to Hollywood, but her dreams evaporated when she found out that her accent exposed her as a "cheap Des Moines trollop" (Brower):

They gave me a test. It was all right in the face. But they talk, now. The pictures, I mean. And when I began to talk, up there on the screen, they knew me for what I was, and so, did I. A cheap Des Moines trollop, that had as much chance in pictures as a monkey has. Not as much. (Conrad 71)

The events of the novel is consists of a combination of various elements and ideas of negative fundamental human experiences, which found in the main protagonists, including Cora's dreams of being something, her journey to realize her dreams begins in her birthplace when she won a contest, but fate, or perhaps divine will, let her down because she chose the shortest and most dangerous paths, what is referred to as dreams can be replaced with the word hope for Cora if the reader knows about her famous phrase, "to work and be



something”( Matsushita 60) and considers this the only positive attribute for her. But when the reader discovers that her famous phrase is just a kind of pretense to persuade Frank to realize her plans.

Then she realizes that she can not rely only on her charm to be someone. Instead, she must make plans to start a new life by climbing the social staircase, but she forgets that she is haunted to her past in Des Moines. Cora is waiting for an opportunity to open the prohibited box containing desires and horrors when she entices her admirer, Frank, to help her murder her husband, Nick. The obvious reason for killing Nick is that they want to be together, but Cora's main motive is to run away from her boring life with Nick, whom she sees as dirty and greasy. (Jaber 79) Cora only married Nick because he at least had the advantage of owning real estate. She yearns for liberation, for the hustle and bustle of life that she cannot find with Nick, but Cora and Frank ignore the fact that the seeds of their doom begin to sprout after each love affair. Cain attempts to show the reader a type of hard-boiled crime, its motives, and its consequences, through the novel of Frank Chambers, a felon with wandering feet, and Cora Papadakis, a svelte femme fatale. Just as snakes lure their prey with their deceptive charm, Cora has lured Frank with her cunning nets.

The relationship that brings the protagonists of the triangle of death together is the business relationship. The loveless marriage and love outside marriage form a sub-theme of repulsion and attraction, but commercial interests drive the plot, which determines the outcome of the story, the end of love (Watanabe 1).

### **The Moral Collapse of Desire**

Cora and Frank are both incessantly plunged into the self-gratification of their most urgent desires: sex and money. Sex is depicted as a primal instinct and an instrument of manipulation between the protagonists. Frank represents instinct, while Cora represents the art of manipulation. Sex is the primary power that brings Frank and Cora together. Although they come from different backgrounds, they are almost involuntarily attracted to each other. Sex is depicted as an uncontrollable desire that looks like primitive conduct. Finally, they found themselves passing the border of what is socially and ethically correct (Jaber 79). Cora utilizes her physical charm to get her beau to commit a crime, Cora has lured Frank into a trap by seducing him with her physical charm and taking control of him to bring him under her control Frank asserts on, “except for the shape, she really was not any raving beauty, but she had a sulky look to her, and her lips stuck out in a way that made me want to mash them in for her” (Conrad 70). A nomadic and vulture man invades the life of a Greek man and his sensual wife, the owners of a restaurant and a gas station. Frank and his wife are involved in an illicit affair. They plan to murder the husband. The first time they fail, and the second time they succeed.

This type of love is categorized as fetishism when someone is attracted to a particular part or body of a woman, not the whole person. This type of psychosexuality is a primitive or animalistic desire. The goal is to satisfy the urge, not to connect with a person. Cain depicts the central role of the woman as a manipulator and arch in contrast to the male role, which, in many cases, is only in pursuit of sex.

The triangle of characters operates through cheating, deception, and treachery. Frank and Cora's motives for cheating and deception stem from their tumultuous desires and the quest for individual benefit. Cora and Frank exchange roles to reach their targets in various and illicit ways at the expense of others. Cora gives Frank what he needs to fulfill his sexual desires. Conversely, she wants Frank's services to achieve her plan to kill her husband Nick and inherit the diner and the ten-thousand-dollar insurance policy. They want to do that regardless of all the humanitarian consequences. The events of this novel reveal the moral degradation that occurs when Cora and Frank commit adultery, cheat on others, and when the primitive desires of persons meet with the temptation of Cora and the lust of Frank (Scaggs 111). Cora represents the postman who rings more than twice, between Nick and Frank. Because she resents her destiny. But the two males ignore her signals, which portend doom (Watanabe 4). From this moment on, the web of lies begins to work. At the beginning of the novel, Frank only wants to scam a free dish of food from a restaurant run by Papadakis and his wife, Cora. The con does not succeed. She presents Frank, a hungry tramp, with a bowl of food, who has an open appetite for everything he sees. In contrast, Cora's appetite is open just to wealth and prestige. Frank claims to be a handyman. Frank sees Cora for the first time. He says, "Then I saw her. She had been out back, in the kitchen, but she came in to gather up my dishes. Except for the shape" (Brauer 73).

Nick agrees to employ Frank as a handyman at his gas station, Nick tells Frank to stay and thinks it is a great deed for Frank to live and eat in his place, but the animalistic nature of Frank devours him and destroys the rest of his humanity, driving his lust as he begins to "smell" Cora when she is near him at work, his desire begins to control his being, "It was like hell, the lunch or the potatoes or the wine," Frank informs reader, "I wanted that woman so bad I could not even keep anything in my stomach." In other words, he vomits (Hoppenstand 70). Cora soon passes the ball to Frank, and the two begin an affair.

### **Fate and Inevitability**

Cain draws similarities between two events that happened to Nick through the power of fate: the first, triggered by a windstorm that damages his restaurant sign, and the second, the calamity triggered by Cora and Frank's sexual relationship that destroys everything. Frank's frantic sexual monopoly on Cora

ironically flips against him, for her power (the power of the dark angel)", in other words, the evil side of lust, exerts control over him, coercing him with its demands and obligating him to give up his precious freedom. Nick views Cora as his "white dove", a beautiful, peaceful being that symbolizes love (the reader knows this is just a delusion). Frank, who has a different opinion, sees Cora as an angry cheetah, a greedy, carnivorous being, but "(he liked her that way)" that has nothing to do with love (Hoppenstand 70). The relationship between the murderous couple falls apart, but justice will eventually prevail. Cora and Frank act on their apparent desires. So, their guilt soon leads them to an inevitable fate as they are bound in a web of lies and cheat to reach their selfish lust. Their best efforts to cover up their crimes have been in vain. Eventually, they are condemned by their guilt and tormented by their deeds.

Frank is immediately attracted to Cora's smoldering sexuality, to her svelte body with a charming beauty that adds to her seductive power. Frank calls Cora a "hell cat," but Nick believes that she is nothing more than his "little white dove." Cora, however, rejects the idea of being a peaceful little white bird (Brauer 74). Cora dominates Frank in various ways, once as a temptress and another time through instigation. She also has a masochistic proclivity; Nick, indeed, is oblivious to the much more intense feelings that simmer from the relationship that was produced between Frank and his wife. As shown in the excerpt below, Cora implores Frank for sexual violence (Jaber 80). Bite me! Bite me! I bit her. I sank my teeth into her lips so deep I could feel the blood spurt into my mouth. It was running down her neck when I carried her upstairs (Server 50).

### **Cora as Femme Fatale**

Cora tries to convince Frank to kill Nick, not through a direct order but through hints and propositions, but in reality, Cora is the mastermind behind the plan to kill her husband. She can manipulate and deceive Frank, making him a fool by calling him "smart" to exploit him to perpetrate the murder on her behalf (Jaber 81). She uses a trick that makes Frank like a toy in her hand; he will do anything she wants. She tells him, "I cannot have a greasy Greek child, Frank. I cannot, that is all. The only one I can have a child by is you" (Hoppenstand 71). She insists on carrying out her plan. Notwithstanding, Cain uncovers moments of her fear and hesitation when her first attempt to murder Nick fails. Where she pretends to have an attack of fears and panic, spends the whole day crying and shaking, telling her beau Frank (Jaber 81). "I was not any hell cat at all, then. I was just a little girl, afraid of the dark" (Skenazy 135):

Well, I have made one mistake. And I have got to be a hell cat, just once, to fix it. But I am not really a hell cat, Frank." "They hang you for that." "Not if you do it right. You are smart, Frank. I never

fooled you for a minute. You will think of a way. Plenty of them have. Don't worry. I am not the first woman who had to turn hell cat to get out of a mess.” (Conard 73)

Even Cora did not love Frank one day, but used him to achieve her personal interests. From a sociological perspective, the theory of instrumental rationality can be applied to Cora's personality, as her behaviors referred to a type of social activity in which individuals use the most effective ways to achieve a desired end.

Cora and Frank's first attempt to kill Nick might have worked if fate had wanted it to. But fate intervenes and plays its role to postpone Nick's murder to an unknown date. The plan goes awry because of a cat and a policeman. And the unsympathetic Greek, i.e., Nick, survives the first murder attempt. Wearing the uniform of a state policeman, he goes to the house and looks around. Cora and Frank plot to have Nick murdered in his bathroom. Cora's role is to hit Nick on the head with a homemade bludgeon, while Frank's role is to watch out next to the car. If someone is there, he should honk the car's horn. Suddenly, the place went dark when a cat got into the fuse box and caused a power outage. Cora strokes Nick and shouts—Frank and the cop reply. Cora tells the cop that Nick slipped and injured his head when the light went off. Later, Frank and Cora try to fool the investigators into thinking it looks like an incident:

Even if we had gone through with it, they would have guessed it. They always guess it. They guess it anyway, just from habit. Because look how quickly that cop knew something was wrong. That is what makes my blood run cold. As soon as he saw me standing there, he knew it. If he could tumble to it all that easily, how much chance would we have if the Greek had died? (Hoppenstand 71).

As a human instinct, Cora and Frank relished Nick's pain when Nick lost his temporary memory due to the blow he suffered from his wife. The cat (white dove) that tries to kill Nick returns in the form of an animal and saves Nick from death:

She leaned back against the wall and began to laugh again, a wild, crazy laugh. 'And the cat came back! it steeped into the fuse box and got killed, but here it is back, Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ah! Ain't that funny, how unlucky cats are for you?' (Nyman 249).

Cora is gaslighting Frank. He admits that he is nothing; at the same time, Cora fools Frank into doing the plot. Frank describes himself as “some kind of an animal” [sic], surrenders to her allure: “I had to have her, if I hung for it” (Jaber 95). He convinces himself that he is Cora's savior. He makes himself the bogey man, forgetting that he is nothing, just a felon bum. From an ethical point of



view, Cora acts with Frank as a mere means to an end, which is a transgression of the most important moral principles, so that this behavior is fraudulent and duplicitous in nature and leverages Frank's feelings and trust for her own interests.

This discourse was her reaction when she was just a housewife and cook. After controlling Frank, her speech becomes more severe when Frank describes himself and his girlfriend, Cora as "a couple of bums", Cora replies: "I told you I wasn't really a bum, Frank. I don't feel like no gypsy", whereupon, as they begin to argue, she recurs the word "bum" in a vicious manner: "You're a bum, that's all. That's what you were when you came here, and that's what you are now" (Matsushita 49). At this moment, Cora's authority. In other words, her fraud turns to be the boss of the gang or/the head chef who offers an unpalatable service with an offensive odor. From the point of view of narcissism, Cora's sense of deserving and lack of sympathy from others compels her to exploit Frank to satisfy her needs for care, authority, and her own resources.

The golden rule of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant stipulates, "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity", which in short means: "Act in such a way that you always treat nature, whether in your own life or in the life of any other, never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end". in Kant's terms, this is called the "ecological imperative" (Vilkka 107). Cora broke all the ethical rules of society and nature when she colluded with Frank to the detriment of her husband, regardless of whether the ways used were ethically, socially, or juridically acceptable.

From an ethical point of view, Cora acts with Frank as a mere means to an end, which is a transgression of the most important moral principles, so that this behavior is fraudulent and duplicitous in nature and leverages Frank's feelings and trust for her own interests. She is considered a mendacious genre.

Cora is unhappy with her old Greek husband; she describes him as a smelly and greasy man. After the situation has reached a boiling point. Cora wants to replace him with a new one, sacrifices her husband and forbids Frank to wear a T-shirt from a car company because many items of clothing belong to her husband, Nick, that suit him:

He is greasy and stinks, and do you think I am going to let you wear a smock, with Service Auto Parts printed on the back, Thank-U Call Again, while he has four suits and a dozen silk shirts? Isn't that business half mine? Don't I cook? Don't I cook well? Do not you do your part?" (Conrad 73)

The fateful destruction of Frank, as well as of Cora herself, does not occur immediately, but increases gradually over the course of the novel, as shown by

the dark angel and his mate, who, despite initial warnings of the consequences of their criminal intentions, do not curb their greed and violence. Even when Frank realizes what fate can do to them, he remains under Cora's control.

Point of view of psychopathy, Cora ignores all social norms. Suffering from psychopathy, she can mislead and exploit people without feeling contrition or blameworthiness. The fateful destruction of Frank, as well as of Cora herself, does not occur immediately, but increases gradually over the course of the novel, as shown by Cora's dark angel and his demon, who, despite initial warnings of the consequences of their criminal intentions, do not curb their greed and violence. Even when Frank realizes what fate can do to them, he remains under Cora's control. Cora, the dark angel, can never be the mother of any human child, just death. Part of her evil power, the center of her powers is sexual manipulation, and her intelligence. She knows that Frank is not smart, but she tells him that he has to build his confidence. She promises him a child if he follows her instructions; by saying it is not "good", it means/refers to "you are smart, but you are no good"; it has a double meaning. The clear implication is that he is an immoral person; yet, Cora colors this meaning to mean that Frank is not "good" as a killer. Therefore, Cora motivates Frank to make a second attempt (Hoppenstand 71).

Cora was born from the womb of the dark triad, which was rooted in her from an early age and whose negative traits are linked to her personality, the pillars of which are: Pragmatism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy. From a pragmatic point of view, Cora has the potential to manipulate Frank for her personal advantage while blatantly disregarding morality.

The steamy sex is just an ambush, arranged by Cora. It is only a short time before they reach an end. The sex quickly leads to a crime, as Cora and Frank plot to kill Nick. When they commit the murder, their passion is tainted and rotten. The plotters begin to suspect each other. After fulfilling their desires at the beginning of the affair, eventually they entered a brutal conflict of wills, in which their ardor exchanged to hatred (Hirsch 156):

We were up on a mountain. We were up so high, Frank. We had it all, out there, that night [referring to the night they killed Nick]. I did not know I could feel anything like that. (Morrison 112) And we kissed and sealed it so it would be there forever, no matter what happened. We had more than any two people in the world. And then we fell. First you, and then me. Yes, it makes it even. We are down here together, but we are not high up anymore. Our beautiful mountain is gone. (Cain 77).

There is an irony in this excerpt when the hobo imposter explains the matters philosophically and religiously in his special way. At the beginning of their affair, Frank and Cora propose to escape together, but Frank refuses to steal

Nick's car. He claims that both an ethical and a licit logic prevent him from stealing a car. Frank said, "Stealing a man's wife, that is nothing. Stealing his car is larceny (Osteen133).

Cora and Frank test the mixture of pleasure at the beginning and in the middle of the novel. After that, their dreams turn into nightmares. After the murder of Nick. They think they are "up on a mountain" And have to face their fate. says Frank, "we are chained to each other, Cora. We thought we were on top of a mountain. That was not it. It is on top of us, and that is where it is been ever since that night" (Whited 80).

Frank's psychological state refers to an emotional weakness resulting from low self-esteem or an endless pursuit of sexual pleasure. This emotional weakness makes Frank an easy target for Cora's manipulation. What begins as a relationship at the start of the novel transforms into a criminal partnership in the middle, and at the end, they get what is coming to them.

The protagonists of this novel do not assimilate into their society, but undermine its values, oppose it, or fall away from it. Frank is at odds with his society when he and his girlfriend kill Nick. Indeed, they break the law and at the same time violate Nick's human rights.

Cora and Frank plot to kill Nick, but their plot is counterproductive. The compass of fate changes its direction towards Frank and Cora when Frank, by chance, kills Cora in a car accident (Della Coletta 27). The second attempt/murder happened in the car. The Tim-witted Nick invites Cora and Frank for a journey to the Santa Barbara Street fair. When they return, Cora is driving her car because Nick is drunk, and Frank is pretending to be drunk. Cora and Frank try to scratch themselves to deceive the police investigation into the accident looks real. "I hauled off and hit her in the eye as hard as I could. She went down. She was right down there at my feet" (Whited 81).

In a case of supreme sexual humiliation, Cora makes love to Frank next to her dead husband's body. Frank has already become a kind of animal, like Cora, stripped of his senses and urged to unleash his basic animal instincts of lust and violence. He has reached a point of no return, has ignored the warnings of fate, and now must pay the social price, forfeiting what remains of his personal freedom (after what Cora took) to the system (Hoppenstand 72). The forbidden acts between the protagonists are interchangeable; they have replaced the violence of killing once with sexual violence at other times. Their actions are considered against the law, morality, and the rights of people in society.

Due to the syndrome of Frank's endless search for sex, or perhaps as hypersexuality, and the naivety, this makes him unable to distinguish between true love and lust, loyalty and manipulation.

Cora's dreams of being something led her to a tragic fate. For her, only priorities were her usefulness and the acquisition of money, as she marries Nick "for money and kills him for money" (Matsushita 60). Eventually, the dreams and the dreamers are vaporized and buried together.

At the end of the novel, Frank comments on Cora's actions with the words, "She wanted something, and she tried to get it. She tried all the wrong ways, but she tried"(Matsushita 61). Frank and Cora belong to a breed of people who strive to engage in mutual corporeal engagement; they are like cannibalism, their backgrounds mockingly reflecting a history that points to the materialistic hunger in their culture. A moment of moral remorse, as Frank says at the end of the novel:

Father, you were right. It all works out. I guess God knows more about these things than we do. Somehow or other, Cora paid for Nick's life with hers. And now, Father, would you send up a prayer for me and Cora, and if you could find it in your heart, make it that we're together, wherever it is? (Mayer 277)

### Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, often read as an unambiguous, straightforward crime story, is essentially a critique of the evasive and destructive nature evident in Frank and Cora's doomed quest for independence and prosperity. Through its unsparing portrayal of Frank and Cora's disastrous desires and their desperate attempts to escape from their difficult past, the story shows how societal pressures and inner moral corruption inevitably lead to their downfall. The story's laconic narrative style and relentless pace reflect the characters' spiral into a fate they can neither escape nor control. Ultimately, Cain's masterpiece is a powerful reminder that transgressions, however justified they may seem by desire, come at a priceless price. It is a cautionary story that resonates beyond its time, pointing out that fate-like a postal worker's tenacious job, regularly delivers what's due. The postal worker is a symbol of fate, and his delivery of the letter represents justice for Frank and Cora. The first time the postal worker rings, they have a chance to escape fate and the justice they deserve (repentance), but the second time the letter carrier rings, they may not be so lucky. Fate and order, as heavenly powers, destroy the evildoers before they can corrupt the morals of society as a whole. Evil lies not in fate or the system, but in the individuals. The deviant must be isolated so that the system can persist, and the system must persist because it is ordained by God. The novel delivers a message to readers; it carries within it the extent of moral decadence that has continued from the past to the present, but must be eliminated and prevented from being transmitted to another generation.



### Recommendations for more research

- This work focused mainly on a close reading of the novel; a future study could examine the same film adaptation.
- A comparative study of the novel with its film adaptations (1946-1981) to see how different filmmakers and writers have interpreted the core idea of fate and desire.
- Future critics may do well to study *The Postman Always Rings Twice* from various points of view, especially the feminist aspect, written in the past and in the future.
- Researchers would do well to focus on psychoanalysis to discover the psychological motivations for the crime committed by Frank and Cora in the novel.

### References

- Badley, Linda, Andrew Nestingen and Jaakko Seppälä. *Nordic Noir, Adaptation, Appropriation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- Brauer, Stephen. *Criminality and The Modern, Contingency and Agency in Twentieth-Century America*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2022.
- Brook, Vincent. *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles*. Rutgers University Press, 2013.
- Brower, Jordan. *Classical Hollywood, American Modernism: A Literary History of The Studio System*. Cambridge University Press, 2024.
- Cain, James M. *The Postman Always Rings Twice, Double Indemnity. Mildred Pierce and Selected Stories: Introduction by Robert Polito*. Everyman's Library, 2003.
- Cain, James M. *Three by Cain: Serenade Love's Lovely Counterfeit, The Butterfly*. Vintage crime/Black Lizard, 1989.
- Cain, James M. *Mildred Pierce*. Vintage Crime/Black Lizard, 1989.
- Conrad, Barnaby. *101 Best Scenes Ever Written: A Romp Through Literature for Writers and Readers*. Linden Publishing, 2006.
- Della Coletta, Cristina. *When Stories Travel: Cross-Cultural Encounters between Fiction and Film*. JHU Press, 2012.
- Hardy, Phil, ed. *The BFI Companion to Crime*. Univ of California Press, 1997.
- Hirsch, Foster. *The Dark Side of The Screen: Film Noir*. Hachette UK, 2008.
- Hoppenstand, Gary. *In Search of the Paper Tiger: A Sociological Perspective of Myth, Formula, and the Mystery Genre in the Entertainment Print Mass Medium*. Popular Press, 1987.
- Jaber, Maysaa Husam. *Criminal Femmes Fatales in American Hardboiled Crime Fiction*. Springer, 2016.
- Madden, David. *The Voice of James M. Cain: A Biography*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2020.
- Matsushita, Sachiko. *Decoding The Postman Always Rings Twice: towards a strategy of reading*. MS thesis. California State University, Northridge, 1987.
- Mayer, Geoff. *Hollywood's Melodramatic Imagination: Film Noir, the Western and Other Genres from the 1920s to the 1950s*. McFarland, 2021.
- Miller, Gabriel. *Screening the Novel: Rediscovered American Fiction in Film*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

- Nyman, Jopi. *Men Alone: Masculinity, Individualism, and Hard-Boiled Fiction*. Vol. 111. Rodopi, 1997.
- Osteen, Mark. *Nightmare Alley: Film Noir and The American Dream*. JHU Press, 2013.
- Scaggs, John. *Crime fiction*. Routledge, 2005.
- Server, Lee. *Encyclopedia of pulp fiction writers*. Infobase Publishing, 2014.
- Skenazy, Paul. *James M. Cain*. Continuum, 1989.
- Vilkka, Leena. *The Intrinsic Value of Nature*. Vol. 59. Rodopi, 1997.
- Walker-Morrison, Deborah. *Classic French Noir: Gender and the Cinema of Fatal Desire*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.
- Watanabe, Nancy. *True Love-Particle-Wave Theory in The Postman Always Rings Twice (1)*. 2021. 10.13140/RG.2.2.29699.22566. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356387101>.
- Whited, Lana A. *Murder, in Fact: Disillusionment and Death in The American True Crime Novel*. McFarland, 2020. |